

Examining Turkish Youth's Reaction to Instagram Influencers: A Sentiment Analysis

Türk Gençliğinin Instagram Influencerlarına Tepkisinin İncelenmesi: Bir Duygu Analizi

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article



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ABSTRACT

This study employs a mixed-methods research methodology to investigate the attitudes of Turkish teenagers towards Instagram influencers. Over the course of one year (December 2022 to December 2023), we collected 18,619 Instagram comments, specifically focusing on Turkish adolescents who were actively interacting with influencers. The sentiment analysis was conducted using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Python to classify the polarity of sentiments expressed in the comments as positive, negative, or neutral. The qualitative content analysis revealed a wide range of feelings and attitudes, highlighting the significant role Instagram influencers play in shaping the ideas, opinions, and world-views of Turkish youth. The study found that admiration, jealousy, inspiration, and anxiety were among the most common emotions elicited by influencers. These emotions were categorized and analyzed to understand their prevalence and intensity. Additionally, the underlying reasons behind these emotions were explored, including the relatability of the content, perceived authenticity of the influencers, and the impact of their lifestyles and messages on the youth's self-perception and social behavior. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how Instagram influencers affect Turkish adolescents. The findings contribute valuable insights to the field of digital culture studies, emphasizing the complex and multifaceted influence of social media on youth.

Keywords: Sentiment Analysis, Instagram, Social Media Influencers, Youth Impact, Turkish Youth

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Türk gençlerinin Instagram fenomenlerine yönelik tutumlarını araştırmak için karma yöntemli bir araştırma metodolojisi kullanmaktadır. Bir yıl boyunca (Aralık 2022'den Aralık 2023'e kadar) Instagram fenomenleri ile aktif olarak etkileşimde bulunan Türk gençlerine ait 18.619 Instagram yorumu toplanmıştır. Duygu analizi, yorumlarda ifade edilen duygu durumlarını olumlu, olumsuz veya nötr olarak sınıflandırmak için Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) ve Python kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nitel içerik analizi, geniş bir duygu ve tutum yelpazesini ortaya çıkarmakta ve Instagram fenomenlerinin Türk gençlerinin düşüncelerini, görüşlerini ve dünya görüşlerini şekillendirmede oynadığı önemli rolü vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, fenomenler tarafından tetiklenen en yaygın duygular arasında hayranlık, kıskançlık, ilham ve kaygı olduğunu tespit etmiştir. Bu duyguların yaygınlığını ve yoğunluğunu anlamak için kategorize edilip analiz edildi. Ayrıca, bu duyguların altında yatan nedenler, içeriğin bağlanabilirliği, fenomenlerin algılanan özgünlüğü ve yaşam tarzları ile mesajlarının gençlerin öz algısı ve sosyal davranışları üzerindeki etkisi de incelenmiştir. Hem nitel hem de nicel verileri bir araya getirerek, bu çalışma Instagram fenomenlerinin Türk gençleri üzerindeki etkisine dair kapsamlı ve ayrıntılı bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Bulgular, sosyal medyanın gençler üzerindeki karmaşık ve çok yönlü etkisini vurgulayarak dijital kültür çalışmaları alanına değerli içgörüler katmaktadır. Bu araştırma, sosyal medya fenomenlerinin gençler üzerindeki etkisini incelerken çeşitli duygusal ve psikolojik boyutların dikkate alınmasının önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygu Analizi, Instagram, Sosyal Medya Influencerları, Gençlik Etkisi, Türk Gençliği

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has revolutionized human communication and entertainment, influencing our ideas, thoughts, and perceptions. Platforms like Instagram provide new avenues for expressing thoughts, feelings, creativity, and identity. Instagram, in particular, has become highly popular, allowing users to create, share, and interact with visual content on various topics. The large followings that many influencers have accumulated demonstrate their significant impact on society and culture, especially among youth. A key feature of Instagram is its ability to foster reliability and connection among users, which is vital for social engagement and activism. Numerous Turkish Instagram influencers, boasting millions of followers, produce and share content on a wide range of topics that resonate deeply with their audience (Ünalmiş, 2021).

The trend of researching how social media affects young people's emotions has grown in recent years. Since social media platforms provide a means of expressing one's ideas, thoughts, talents, and worries, researchers are becoming increasingly in-

terested in learning how these platforms affect users' worldviews (Krämer et al., 2021). The investigation of users' opinions regarding these platforms is another area of study. Instagram is becoming increasingly popular among young people in Türkiye, and this means that there is a need to look into its significance and effects in other areas of life, like social norms, lifestyle, ideology formation, culture, and education. Understanding how Instagram influencers impact users' lives may be gained by examining the words and opinions they share on this social media platform (Weismayer et al., 2021).

The impact of Instagram is a current topic that this study examines from the viewpoint of Turkish adolescents. Instagram has a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviors of young people in Türkiye, so it's important to know how they feel about the site and the different ways it affects their lives. Instagram is becoming increasingly popular, and this social media site is having a big impact on how our young people think and live (Pilař et al., 2021).

An in-depth knowledge of the influence of the platform on the lives of Turkish youth can be obtained by analyzing their feelings toward Instagram influencers. The cultural, sociological, educational, and behavioral consequences these influencers have on youth can be uncovered through this approach. The study's conclusions will add to the body of knowledge and provide scholars and educators with insightful knowledge on how to use this platform to achieve desired results in social, cultural, analytical, and educational contexts (Chattaraj & Vijayaraghavan, 2021).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In alignment with the research objectives of this study, the researcher aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the sentiments of Turkish youth towards Instagram influencers?
2. How do Instagram influencers impact the cultural, societal, and educational paradigms among Turkish youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2004, social media gained widespread popularity (Vogel et al., 2014), but its primary purpose at first was as a tool for social networking. Its original intent has changed over time to become a useful teaching tool that supports peer connection, cooperative learning, and active learning for both teachers and students (Trentin, 2010). Being one of the biggest data generation tools, social media platforms are changing quickly and have the ability to change the world (Rogers, 2016). They now provide supplemental learning resources, such as audio and video lectures that can be found on YouTube and other educational websites, which are crucial for both official and informal education.

Social media not only helps students in the classroom, but it also changes their worldview and perspectives. It aids in their skill acquisition and encourages them to lead healthier lives (Couture-Wilhelmy et al., 2021). It presents certain obstacles in addition to new opportunities (Malik, 2018). Social media has lowered boundaries based on geography, improved networking and connectedness, given people a platform for self-expression and online learning, raised awareness, and encouraged social activities. Nevertheless, it also brings with it difficulties including invasion of privacy, cyberbullying, addiction, false information, and mental health disorders that affect learning and teaching standards (Shariff, 2008).

In 2010, Instagram made its debut as a platform mainly for exchanging photos and videos (Wu, 2021). It gained popularity among teenagers and young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the World Health Organization (WHO) and other healthcare professionals used it to spread knowledge about illness prevention. It is currently one of the most popular social networking sites among young people (Akram et al., 2015). Instagram influencers cultivate their fan base by endorsing specific concepts, worldviews, lifestyles, and products, so profoundly impacting the younger generation (Siddiq, 2023).

Instagram was one of the most downloaded social media apps in 2019. Its popularity stems from features that allow users to earn money, initiate trends, and amplify content using hashtags. The platform's competitive nature and visual appeal keep users engaged (Celuch, 2021). Instagram attracts users from diverse societal backgrounds, including healthcare providers, charity organizers, and independent content creators. However, not all users have access to the full range of features; typically, independent content creators and verified accounts enjoy all features and have higher engagement metrics (Dobrian et al., 2011).

Age, education, income, and race all have an impact on how people view the internet and social media as well as their intents (Gangadharbatla, 2008). Their interactions with these platforms are shaped by their beliefs and usage patterns, which in turn impact their psychological characteristics and well-being. Numerous factors have an impact on mental health and social and personal traits, including social surveillance, amusement, recognition, emotional support, network extension, and maintenance (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

Sentiment analysis is a well-known opinion mining method that helps corporations, legislators, financial advisors, educators, and healthcare professionals make data-driven, well-informed judgments. It entails gathering and examining views, ideas, and impressions regarding a range of themes, things, and services as well as monitoring attitudes and perceptions (Jansen et al., 2009). Sentiment analysis is beneficial to businesses, governments, and organizations (Wankhade et al., 2022).

Social media, especially Instagram, heavily influence the youth, thus finding out how they feel about Instagram influencers offers a thorough insight of how these platforms affect both their online and offline lives. Young people's opinions of Instagram influencers can be influenced by a variety of things, including world events like the COVID-19 pandemic that drove more individuals to use social media apps and digital tools. Instagram provided young people in several nations with a platform for self-expression and online education during the pandemic.

Studying the sentiments of youth in countries such as the United States, Vietnam, and Türkiye about Instagram influencers can reveal insights into their digital culture, the impact on social engagement and cultural norms, mental well-being, and educational and literacy statuses (Younis, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The study examined how Turkish teenagers felt about Instagram influencers using a mixed-methods research approach. Methods for gathering and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data were employed in order to comprehend this phenomenon on a deeper level. In order to provide a comprehensive and authentic portrayal of the opinions spoken by Turkish youth, data was collected from Instagram comments.

During one year, 18,619 Instagram comments were collected (December 2022 to December 2023). These remarks were gathered from several posts published by well-known Instagram influencers that young people in Türkiye follow. We employed automated data scraping tools to collect user comments from Instagram. These tools systematically extract publicly available comments while ensuring compliance with data privacy regulations. This approach enabled us to gather a large volume of data efficiently and effectively for our analysis. The study used polarity classification, which is an essential step in sentiment analysis since it gives researchers a basic classification of sentiments and enables a more detailed understanding of participants' feelings toward the influencers. Polarity classification might be positive, negative, or neutral attitudes. We chose the most popular Instagram influencers for our study to ensure that we analyzed figures who have a significant impact and reach among the Turkish youth. This choice was made to accurately reflect the influencers who are most relevant and influential to our target demographic.

Python and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) were used for sentiment analysis and polarity categorization. Python provided the computational tools necessary for data processing and analysis, while LDA helped in identifying and categorizing the latent topics within the comments. We utilized several text mining algorithms, including sentiment analysis and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) for topic modeling. The sentiment analysis algorithm classified the sentiments expressed in the comments into positive,

negative, and neutral categories. This classification was based on a pre-trained model using a comprehensive dataset specifically designed for sentiment analysis in the context of social media. The comments were then preprocessed by correcting spelling errors, removing emojis and special characters, and eliminating duplicate entries.

In this age of technology, data collection has transitioned to more convenient methods such as online platforms. For this study, Instagram comments were extracted and analyzed using automated data scraping tools. This method ensured that a large volume of data could be collected efficiently and effectively. Participation was voluntary as the comments were publicly available on social media, and all data were anonymized to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality.

DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed for the study. The sentiment analysis of Instagram comments was done using Python. 18,619 comments were gathered for the dataset between December 2022 and December 2023, a period of one year. Sentiment analysis was employed for the qualitative analysis to streamline the data analysis procedure and provide a more lucid comprehension of the viewpoints, feelings, and actions conveyed by the respondents. After the Instagram comments were retrieved, they were cleaned up for the study by deleting special characters and emojis, removing duplicate entries, and fixing spelling mistakes.

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Python were utilized to examine the opinions stated in the comments. While sentiment analysis classified the polarity of sentiments into positive, negative, and neutral categories, latent topic analysis (LDA) assisted in identifying and classifying the latent subjects within the comments. This method made it possible to comprehend Turkish youth's feelings toward Instagram influencers in a more complex way. To make sure the categorization was accurate, a human evaluation of a sample of comments and labels generated by the sentiment analysis was done. The machine-generated sentiment labels were verified through this review process, which also guaranteed the accuracy of the analysis. Furthermore, content analysis was carried out to present a more comprehensive view of the circumstances. The three polarity types of sentiments—positive, negative, and neutral—were the focus of the content analysis. In addition to providing deeper insights into the cultural, sociological, and educational effects of Instagram influencers on Turkish youth, this method helped corroborate the sentiment analysis's findings.

Results and Discussion

This section will look at the results of the sentiment analysis carried out for this study, which sought to understand how the Turkish youth felt about Instagram influ-

encers. The study's descriptive data, which include the demographics of the examined comments, will be presented and discussed first. After that, we'll talk about the sentiment and content analysis findings, emphasizing the main feelings that participants had about Instagram influencers.

The sample of the present study consisted of Instagram comments made by Turkish youth over a one-year period (December 2022 to December 2023). The collected data provided insights into the participants' sentiments towards Instagram influencers.

The sentiment analysis categorized the comments into three polarity categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Python and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) were used to perform this analysis. The results were validated through a human review process to ensure accuracy.

Sentiment	Frequency	Percent
Positive	7,448	40.0%
Negative	6,361	34.2%
Neutral	4,810	25.8%
Total	18,619	100.0%

Table 1 shows the overall sentiment distribution of the Instagram comments analyzed in the study. The majority of the comments were positive (40.0%), followed by negative (34.2%) and neutral (25.8%). Table 2 provides examples of statements categorized by sentiment polarity. Table 3 summarizes the latent topics identified through LDA, with the top keywords and a brief summary for each topic.

Statement	Sentiment
"I love how inspiring these influencers are; they really motivate me to improve myself."	Positive
"Some influencers just promote unrealistic lifestyles, which can be quite harmful."	Negative
"It depends on the content; some posts are useful while others are not so much."	Neutral

Table 3. Latent Topics Identified using LDA

Topic Number	Top Keywords	Summary
1	fashion, trend, outfit, style	Comments discussing fashion trends
2	Fitness, health, workout	Comments focused on health and fitness
3	Beauty, makeup, skincare	Comments about beauty and skincare

Table 4. Frequency of Comments per Topic

Topic Number	Frequency	Percent
1	5,375	28.9%
2	4,254	22.8%
3	8,990	48.3%
Total	18,619	100.0%

Table 5. Sentiment Polarity by Topic

Topic Number	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
1	2,150	2,030	1,195	5,375
2	1,807	1,303	1,144	4,254
3	3,491	3,028	2,471	8,990
Total	7,448	6,361	4,810	18,619

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of comments for each topic identified. Table 5 provides a breakdown of sentiment polarity for each topic identified through LDA.

Table 6. Content Analysis - Key Themes Identified

Theme	Frequency	Example Statements
Positive Influence on Lifestyle	3,850	"These influencers have really helped me develop a healthier lifestyle."
Unrealistic Standards and Pressure	3,105	"The pressure to look perfect all the time because of these influencers is too much."
Neutral/Varied Content Perception	2,310	"Some influencers provide great content, but some are just not worth following."

Table 6 lists the main themes that were discovered via content analysis along with the sample sentences for each theme. All things considered, the results provide insightful information about how Turkish youth feel about Instagram influencers. The variety of feelings and emotions exhibited by young people suggests that they have a range of different perspectives. There is a lot of negative attitude surrounding the platform and its content, even if many respondents show a propensity to follow and appreciate Instagram influencers. This demonstrates the intricate and varied impact that Instagram influencers have on young people in Türkiye.

Emotional Dimensions of Instagram Influencers' Impact

To enhance the depth of our analysis on the emotional dimensions of Instagram influencers' impact on the Turkish youth, we conducted a detailed examination of the various emotional responses elicited by these influencers. This involved categorizing emotions such as admiration, jealousy, inspiration, and anxiety, and analyzing their prevalence and intensity. Additionally, we explored the underlying reasons behind these emotions, including the relatability of the content, perceived authenticity of the influencers, and the impact of their lifestyles and messages on the youth's self-perception and social behavior. By incorporating these aspects, our study provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how Instagram influencers emotionally affect the Turkish youth.

Emotion	Description	Prevalence (%)
Admiration	Positive feelings towards influencers, inspired by their achievements	35.26
Jealousy	Negative feelings stemming from comparing oneself to influencers	25.68
Inspiration	Feelings of motivation and encouragement derived from influencers' content	20.24
Anxiety	Feelings of stress and inadequacy due to perceived pressures from influencers	15.18
Other	Mixed or neutral emotions not clearly falling into the above categories	3.64

In our analysis, admiration emerged as the most prevalent emotional response, with 35.26% of the comments expressing positive feelings towards influencers, often inspired by their achievements and lifestyles. Jealousy was the second most common

emotion, found in 25.68% of the comments, reflecting the negative feelings some youth experience when comparing themselves to influencers. Inspiration was noted in 20.24% of the comments, where influencers' content motivated and encouraged viewers. Anxiety accounted for 15.18% of the comments, indicating the stress and inadequacy some youth feel due to perceived pressures from influencers. The remaining 3.64% of comments reflected mixed or neutral emotions.

By examining these emotional responses and their underlying causes, we aim to provide a more detailed understanding of how Instagram influencers affect the emotional well-being of Turkish youth. This analysis highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of the influence these social media figures have on their audience.

Additionally, qualitative analysis was used in this mixed-method study. The Instagram comments were examined by content analysis. As was previously indicated, the researcher sought to examine the data according to the polarity class of sentiment—positive, negative, or neutral. As a result, these polarity categories were taken into consideration when designing the qualitative phase of data analysis. The responders' sentiments were ascertained by closely reading and rereading the comments. To discern between positive, negative, and neutral attitudes, the data were methodically examined and polarity-classified.

Positive Sentiments

Positive remarks in the comments brought to light features that respondents valued and found appealing about Instagram and its influencers. The terms “inspiring,” “motivational,” “helpful tips,” “improved self-esteem,” “engaging,” “community building,” “spreading joy,” “career guidance,” “quick updates,” “entertaining,” “creative,” and “relatable” were among those that were recognized as positive. These findings suggest that the strategic sharing of personal content, emotive expressions, and endorsements by influencers can cultivate a sense of connection and support in their audience (Tricomi et al., 2023; Karamustafic et al., 2020).

Negative Sentiments

The main points of contention in the negative comments were the shortcomings and critiques of Instagram influencers' material. Words like “superficial,” “time-wasting,” “irrelevant,” “vulgar,” “fake lifestyle,” “materialistic,” “blind following,” “negative influence,” “harmful content,” “depressing,” “eroding values,” “body-shaming,” “negative propaganda,” “privacy invasion,” and “security threats” were used by respondents to convey their negative feelings. These sentiments point to a need for greater authenticity, integrity, and responsibility among influencers to ensure a healthier online ecosystem (Jin & Ryu, 2020).

Neutral Sentiments

In this study, the keywords were taken directly from the comments left by the participants. Overall, the results of the qualitative and quantitative studies are congruent. Youth in Türkiye have conflicting opinions on using Instagram and the impact of its influencers. The results of this study indicate that Instagram has an impact on social interactions, personal identity, and the learning of new skills and information. However, it may also result in other problems including anxiety, worries about privacy, difficulties with social and psychological aspects, and more. In sum, the impacts of Instagram influencers on youth can be positive, negative, or neutral, depending on how they utilize the platform and how their audience perceives and interacts with the content.

Furthermore, these results demonstrate that no single viewpoint can fully convey the story in the social media-driven world of today. It is critical to acknowledge the range of viewpoints, life experiences, and feelings that exist within a given demographic. A one-size-fits-all strategy is insufficient to comprehend the nuanced ways in which Instagram and its influencers can impact people and society (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). In conclusion, the examination of Turkish youth's perceptions and feelings about Instagram influencers highlights the range of feelings and viewpoints that exist among this demographic. Instagram has a complicated and wide-ranging impact on people's personal lives, worldviews, emotions, education, and society as a whole (Fidan et al., 2021). The results of this survey highlight how important it is to take into account different viewpoints and life experiences while talking about the platform's place in modern society. In summarizing the findings, the research reveals a complex and multifaceted relationship between Instagram influencers and their audience, with a range of positive, negative, and neutral sentiments expressed by the participants (Tricomi et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to gain a thorough grasp of Turkish youth's perceptions about Instagram influencers. The researchers combined qualitative content analysis and sentiment analysis of Instagram comments using mixed-methods approach to offer a comprehensive view of the platform's current place in our culture. Instagram's enormous influence on our culture, particularly among young people, is demonstrated by the growing trend of utilizing the site and following its influencers (Khalid et al., 2018). The results of the study show that young people in Türkiye have conflicting opinions about Instagram, ranging from favorable to unfavorable. Both groups—those who have positive and negative attitudes about Instagram—have valid reasons for their beliefs.

Implications

The implications of this study are significant for various stakeholders. For educators and policymakers, understanding the mixed sentiments of youth towards Instagram influencers can help in developing strategies to harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its negative impacts (Vrontis et al., 2021). For instance, influencers can be engaged in promoting educational content and positive social behaviors. Social media platforms can also take note of the concerns raised by users and work towards creating a safer and more constructive environment (Fire et al., 2014).

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the data were collected from Instagram comments, which might not fully represent the broader sentiments of the Turkish youth (Ternov, 2021). Secondly, the sentiment analysis was based on publicly available comments, which might not capture the private views of individuals (Prichard et al., 2015). Additionally, the study focused solely on Instagram, and the findings may not be generalizable to other social media platforms. The qualitative content analysis, while thorough, is subjective and could be influenced by the researcher's interpretation (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Future Research

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a more diverse sample, including private interviews and surveys to capture a wider range of sentiments. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into how sentiments towards Instagram influencers evolve over time. Moreover, comparative studies involving different social media platforms could highlight unique and shared influences on youth. Investigating the specific content types that generate positive versus negative sentiments could further enhance our understanding of the dynamics between influencers and their audience.

In conclusion, it is critical that scholars, educators, and legislators carry out in-depth and nuanced analyses on Instagram's influence on the thoughts and opinions of our children as the platform grows and shapes pop culture and digital media. Instagram can lead to good changes in social, cultural, and educational environments when used appropriately. Through the provision of both qualitative and quantitative insights, this study advances this exploration and knowledge.



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